~~B. B. biographer~~

~~t.t.p.~~

~~[illegible]~~

+ Canyon Cinema history (2)

A

EXCELLENT!

8/17

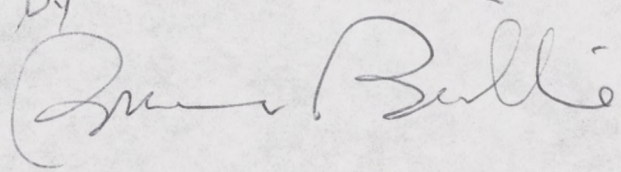
BB

Baillie, Bruce

Original 60-94

Campson letter

by



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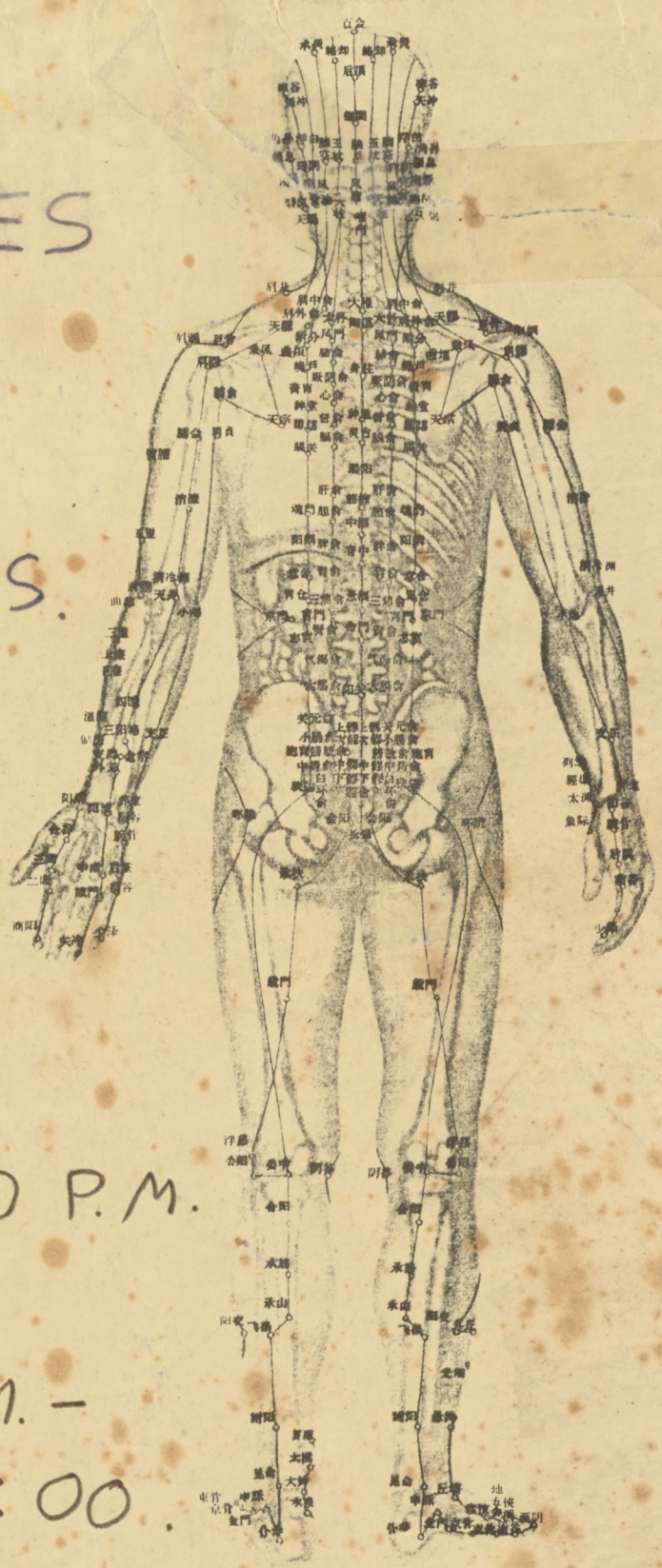

10 A.M. –
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&
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圖2 背面經穴

BEHIND GARAGE, FOLLOW
SIGN'S →

NY - mid 70's - "Amazing Dog Woman"

Lorie, Wind and Dr. Bish
BAILLIE
669 West Kodiak Avenue
Camano Island, WA 98292
(206) 387-1081

Oct. 10, 1994

Dear News:

Congratulations on the new Canyoncinema News. It's very good to see after some years. As I write this morning, I am having a second bowl of our famous Filmmakers' Cereal, introduced through the early News of the 60's. Dr. Bish, first appearing on the medical as well as cultural scenes in the mid-seventies, now holds the franchise for the original Filmmakers' Cereal, under the generic term, Remedies.

This morning's formula: Cooked grains with organic raisins, soft tofu, and a local pear. Add cooked rice - brown rice in CA. - raw wheat germ, yeast, milk or yogurt, and perhaps blackstrap molasses. (Some of this latter a lingering influence from mid-forties S. CA. - the Balboa Ballroom, Stan Kenton, the Glendale Y, Santa Monica.) Our Laboratories report some possible side effect in a temporary swelling of the ankles.

We occasionally reported on these phenomena, as well as offering a variety of recipes in the Canyon/News, as indicated by recent editor, Claire Bain.

Canyon Cinema was born in 1960 in Canyon, California - just behind and between Berkeley and Oakland - after I had returned from studying at the London School of Film Technique and recovering from London in Malaga, Spain. A small sign, CANYON CINEMA up on the garage by an outdoor light bulb - on top of Canyon, almost to the summit from where one could/can see Infinite to the east, covered with mysterious rolling hills, valleys and more hills. (When I was struggling in '67 with hepatitis this is where I found myself as I fell into a coma, returning only through mental effort, by the way I had already traveled too far.)

Kikuko and I with our two dogs next to John Adams, his dog and family. She, employed in Oakland as an elementary school teacher. I had taken a job with Safeway from which I was fairly soon fired. "Mr. Baillie, you are not really suited for the retail food business," (Bill B_____, Mgr.). Friends would drop in to catch me in my checker's role. I recall stocking the Busy Baker cracker dept., white sides out, by chance: Mr. B_____ behind me in a mild rage (the crackers were - obviously - supposed to have the blue side

(2) suited for the retail food business," (Bill B_____, Mgr.). Friends would drop in to catch me in my checker's role. I recall stocking the Busy Baker cracker dept., white sides out, by chance: Mr. B_____ behind me in a mild rage (the crackers were - obviously - supposed to have the blue side out). I thought the white would be nice for a change. I tell my daughter, Wind, this story, preparing her for a career with Safeway, Inc.

From Safeway I earned the Bolex I still have. Then I borrowed money for a new B & H projector, purchased from Bing's Camera, San Francisco, and acquired a large surplus screen which we stretched over a frame out beyond the house, in back beneath the hill. I had finally decided to invent my own occupation, having failed to find gainful employment: I set up a room as "office", and more or less simultaneously began to learn to use the Bolex while attempting to establish some sort of exhibition facility - there being nonesuch outside New York City as far as I knew.

We began to send out postcards with our weekly programs, from free embassy films, etc. Our audience at first mostly residents - the Mott Canons of Canyon, and so on. Kikuko made the popcorn, I set up the theater, neighbor children brought up the old, original Canyon Park benches and chairs. Some of our audience sat on the roof, others in or under trees. There was then an air of ... necessity, a real community between projected image and audience.

A few wandering filmmakers and other saints appeared now and again to show - often to premiere their work - and I began to make contact with filmmakers across the Bay in SF.

At this time I had a full-time volunteer job, or apprenticeship with Marvin Becker, of Becker Films, somewhere over by south Third Street, SF. I would drive over the bridge in[a] $25 junked '49 green Chevy coupe with a furious brakeline leak that required refilling every trip. Here I made my first film, On Sundays, from Marvin's gift of outdated B/W reversal stock. My friend, Ms. Wong, was the star of that film. Also a man I had met, parking my car under the bridge near his accommodations in an abandoned van.

Later with Chicky Strand, we moved Canyon to Berkeley, showing in various locations, too often with the disapproval of early 60's merchants, now mostly extinct, since the short-lived arts revolution there, followed by the politics of the period - the marches to Oakland via the University, sheriffs atop nearby buildings, eventually firing down on

the marchers, killing one man, as I recall. Overturned cars in downtown Oakland, space-age phalanxes of police (a vision, a forecast of contemporary Rwanda or Haiti), Michael Stewarts and Bruce Baillies up lampposts to safety with flaming Bolexes ... footage still in my archives.

Canyon's programming began to include our "Newsreel" (Mr. Hayashi, for example), more independently created, contemporary work, and a chapter from one of many 30's - 40's serials, e.g., The Lost Isle of Lemuria, starring Bela Lugosi as "Uncle Frank", which soon became my Canyon family name.

Chick - Mother Chicky she was sometimes called (we made some sort of flower and quince pies together with whole-wheat crust - unbreakable if dropped from four or five feet). We benevolently - or malevolently - took these pies around to friends and neighbors. Was it not the Age of Love, of flowers and flowering?!) Chick worked as a transcriber for UC, while I was employed on the nightshift in Oakland's Chevy plant. Kikuko, my lifetime mentor and muse, moved near the plant; we continued to see each other before she was married and moved away.

Programming took place in Strand's backyard on sunny Saturdays. Husband, Paul Strand kept the VW bus going which we used to haul our growing Circus (as in von Richthoven, circa 1915-18). Someone donated a large new screen which went overboard enroute on the freeway and was finally replaced. We showed at the Oakland Arts Institute for awhile - always locked (later inspiring my screenplay, The Shoe Salesman), requiring some gymnastics to climb into a high window and descend onto the theater backdrop, suspended by ropes from the rafters, like in the dangerous Opera House of the Phantom of the Opera.

We also showed in North Beach, along with our weekly or bi-monthly Berkeley schedule, amongst the post-Beat folk, the books, bars, bands and poetry readings. The SF Mime Troupe and the SF Tape Music Centre were emerging at this time, mid-60's. We cooperated with the Centre in various ways - Morton Subotnik and Ramon Sender were giving concerts, while the Mime Troupe often performed in the park, as perhaps they still do.

There were volunteers who joined us, helping to pick up folding chairs from two mortuaries, returning same after our showings, shipping films, putting up our own advertising and taking it down, taking turns at projection, etc. It was a busy time, with little money for operations. I was

meanwhile making my own films, gradually, and trying to survive on unemployment, making payments to the bank for a used Ampex recorder, the projector, etc., renting a splicer and synchronizer as required, shipped via bus from Hollywood. I remember tears at having no tools, no film with which to do my work.

The Berkeley police too often appeared at the last moment before a show, claiming fire hazard or whatever. For these emergencies, we had a backup squad out front in VW buses - everyone aboard, and off to the Finnish Hall on the west side where I remember premiering a well-made film by Max Katz.

From the Chevy plant, I went over to San Francisco to work on the docks inspecting bananas from Costa Rica - also working an off-and-on job at the Oakland Naval Supply Center, unloading boxcars and loading ships with freight bound for the Pacific, and meeting ships to help passengers with their luggage who were met by a Navy band and their relations. Great crews, nice environment, until the Vietnam War and its exigencies made it impossible to continue. We had introduced at Canyon, a door prize for every Berkeley showing - being quite often two randomly selected admissions to one of our favorite Finnish saunas (now disappeared from a more pleasant world, along with the redwood shingled architecture of 50's Berkeley). We gave away free bananas as well, and sometimes a cake baked by Chicky's daughter, Valery, and Tung's *1 daughter, Shima.

Enter Chick Callenback, then literary editor with UC Press and editor of Film Quarterly, his own periodical of film criticism. Chick C. offered a backyard and his small shed by the creek that ran through parts of Berkeley. By this time we had in mind founding a community equipment facility - this was our (impoverished) beginning - the idea never became a viable reality in the U.S. as far as I am aware.

The News was Chick - Ernest Callenbach's invention, set into motion as a monthly, I believe, later a quarterly - about 1963. My mother, Gladys Baillie, managed the accounting and mailing, etc. We would gather together at mailing time to assemble, staple, fold and address the News, contributing the funds ourselves as we did toward paying our film rental bills, beyond audience contributions from film showings. My mom usually made cookies for these events. as time went by, the News developed into a major part of Canyon's attentions, especially when we wrote it up in Caspar and Mendocino*2: "The Blackberrie Tarts Division,"

with Paul and Nancy Tulley, reports on kite duels above Caspar Flats, and all sorts of wonderment. This is where I first met Michael Wallin, a summer session with the Mendocino Art Center. The News had various editors

including a few issues in high contrast process by Carl Linder. A complete set of early Canyon Cinema News is with the Canyon archives in SF, there are also copies with Film Arts Foundation, according to the new News, Sept., '94: #94-1.

(cont. para., with "I left—")

I left a pile of this material with Canyon when I was obliged to leave California in the later 70's. Recently wrote a letter to Canyon suggesting we try and reprint the early News, perhaps, and offer them for sale, mail to

members, etc. We need a T-shirt with the original "CanyonCinema man" as design!*3

space

I recall a showing we gave at a junior college out by Walnut Creek, of Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures, requested

by the administration, or "Deanery": A dry, hot day, windy - the sort of day one might recall from youth on a date with a girl three years and three inches taller than himself. Offering a (large) Baby Ruth, which in the 40's was 10¢, (or, cents) that would rapidly become both limpid and melty - the theater smelling on hot afternoons of upstairs toilets and buttery popcorn. Yet there was a kind of inexorable fatality to it, sitting there, sweaty pants stuck to the cheeks, with uncertain emotions and rows of red mohair seats, the nauseating chocolate, etc.

Anyhow, we showed Flaming Creatures in a hot WWII Quonset hut, with rude ~~gentiles~~ genitiles suspended over bare feminine shoulders and breasts, to the old tune, Amapollo, a lovely film (Lovely NY!). This, sometime in almost mid-sixties, I suppose. And the endless subsequent correspondence from outraged collegians, families and administrators!

My comment to Chicky: "Well, it's an institution of higher learning, isn't it?!"

And so it went. Many adventures and tales to recount.

We discovered James Broughton was living in San Francisco. There was a section in the pre-Brandon catalogue devoted to James' work as well as to the films of Maya Deren, Willard Maas, Sydney Peterson and others. I met James one dark night at his home where I found a wonderful empathy and sense of camaraderie toward the impossible tasks ahead. The (later) Brandon distribution center whose earlier name eludes me at the moment, (Audio-Brandon?) was out on Clement Street, managed by Willard Morrison. Willard

also became a friend through many years, and eventually took it upon himself to include some of our films in the "experimental" section of his catalogue. In 1963, he also advanced me the sum necessary for 6 or 7 rolls of EK film, my first color*4.

Will Hindle lived on Vallejo Street, off Van Ness, across from a Chinese laundry. He would cross the street to pick up two or three laundered shirts, artfully wrapped in transparent bags, and perhaps buy a few things at the corner store which is still there. His closet, shared with roommate, George _____, whose last name will likely remain forgotten*5, was a memorably long and scrupulously exact recess with trousers and slacks on the one side, separated according to their owners; shirts and jackets being on the opposite. Shoes - polished - beneath hanging clothes on both sides. It always reminded me of a page from an uptown clothiers' catalogue!

As well as the works of Paul Hindemith (Pastorale d'Ete), there were albums of musicals - Oklahoma, and so on, one or the other usually playing. I also recall pieces of San Francisco architecture arranged around the apartment: the base of a column, part of a church window, a Victorian door frame, etc. In the rear was Bill's studio area, for editing, shooting interiors and titles, recording and commercial still photography. He used only simple equipment; e.g., measuring by hand the 1/4" non-sync sound master for his first several films. Sometimes Kikuko, the dogs and I would bring over food while he was working. I would help out at times by running through reels of sound while Will was editing film. We later worked together for CBS I think it was, doing a segment for the PM West Show, on one occasion, driving down to Santa Barbara to film their annual Fiesta in a studio car, accompanied by a fellow (whose jacket I still wear after he left town without his clothes in 1963), an escapee from the Presidio Army Hospital. We had a good time together, I wonder where he might be now.

All this for another occasion, mentioned here because Will Hindle was a special friend and artist with whom I worked closely for some time, and for whom there was a vital interest in the shaping of our Canyon Cinema. I will always remember the "silvery" images he was able to get out of his Bolex, especially through his 3" Kodak lens, which I was privileged to use one or two times. His mother still lives, at the age of more than one-hundred years, in the state of Alabama.

Pauline Kael began occasionally to write of our "precious" films. She was always a good friend and a severe, literate critic. Jordan Belson lived in SF and made his

abstract masterpieces there in an austere, lovely, monastic apartment. He photographed through holes in small pieces of board. He had a tiny, precise and quiet 16MM theater in his small apartment, the best for its scale I have seen. Kenneth Anger lived for a time, I remember, in rooms he occupied above a nice little theater somewhat east of North Beach, near the old open market, with its lovely and mysterious, usually Gay apartments looking out on the carts and stalls of fresh produce below. I can still see his big Kodak single-lens 16MM in its velvet-lined case - was it blue? He did A-roll only, using a frame splicer and mylar tape on one-side. cont. para.

I also recall his buck Rogers collection - large theater posters, the Buck Rogers ray-gun (which I also remember actually on sale in the 30's at the toy counter of Woolworth's) and the small cast iron rocket ship. I traveled extensively one year, '64 or '65, with his famous Scorpio Rising, Vanderbeek's Breath Death, and my own Mass.

Larry & Patty Jordan lived in SF, later north of the Golden Gate - he was the first "independent filmmaker" I'd heard of. Speaking to Patty across the Bay by phone in Early '61 or so, I was making my first naive inquiries ... how, where to begin, etc.?! Later, we often showed Larry's work at Canyon and crossed paths through the Midwest, New York, etc., along with other film artist-friends such as Stan Brakhage, Ken & Flo Jacobs, Stan Vanderbeek and Ed Emshwiller & his family.

Jonas Mekas and crew were moving into the new Anthology Film Archives: I recall an early showing with Gregory Markopoulos making an appearance, wearing a long beige cashmere coat off the shoulders, Fellini style, followed by his entourage.

As the custom of touring with films matured, between '64 and the beginning of the 70's, approximately, one found various places on the map where he/she could feel at home: In NYC I always stayed with filmmaker Charles Levine and his mother. Mrs. Levine kept us alive with her cooking, especially the chicken soup! I enjoyed as well my few stays at the old Chelsea Hotel, where Brendan Behen and Dylan Thomas had stayed - gold plaques outside on the front, also Harry Smith, I believe (no plaque). I used to give roses to all the ladies in the bar next door, and a case of champagne with bread and cheese to my audience when I showed in NY. And there was Leslie Trumbull to come along and run Filmmakers' Cooperative for such a long time, on Lexington Avenue, where it is managed now by MM Sara.

Peggy, how hard to include. If too much, forget it. X.

We had Ann Arbor and the yearly film festival, founded by George Manpelli, an old friend in whose house I used to stay, premiering new work year after year. For exercise in winter blizzards, along with composer Gordon Mumma, we would shovel cars out of the snow or shovel older people's walks, no charge. For a short while

Gordon Mumma

there was Pocatello and the hot spring, until poet Ed Dorn and a circle of other brilliant professors were asked to leave by the city's fundamentalist fathers!

I was traveling in '65 through both places, shooting Quixote, with a quick run down to Selma, Alabama, from Ann Arbor, Michigan. David Spellman of Aberdeen, SD had loaned me $25 to get off the ground - I gave a show at the college in Bozeman for $50 attended by three students and one teacher (It was a football ~~high~~ night). The first leg of Quixote was more or less sponsored by my dear friend, Tseng Ching, a music fellow at Mills College - we traveled together, with my dog (Mamma) through the Southwest before I struck out in the winter for the north. I will always be grateful to Ms. Tseng and numerous other friends - and the free, outdated film we picked up in an Hollywood alley - for helping me to make that film. It was not until a year later that I was able financially to develop the closet full of negatives.

And for a time there was Sally Dixon's in Pittsburgh. A very lovely lady who gave her three-story home over to our importunities, arranging our shows, etc. A local film group formed there, where our friend, Robert Haller first appeared to us - now with Anthology Film Archives in NY. There is some unfinished material I shot at Sally's for the Roslyn Romance, from the "later Pittsburgh period", in my own archivery. It was/is of an hilarious supper with Sally, Ken Anger, Robert Haller, Myself, Ondine and Roger Jacoby - we were creating an impromptu Western script that wouldn't stop. At Sally's, I took to sleeping on the floor in the cellar next to the washing machine, while - I recall - greeting the newly arrived Kenneth Anger (he gave his entire Magic Lantern cycle at the University of Pittsburgh to an audience of 6 or 7, entirely indifferent to the size of the turnout, answering questions professionally, then retiring again to Sally's, where he took the upstairs suite). In the cellar, I was occasionally blessed with a lovely companion for the night, or an afternoon, it was always a joy to visit there. With my dog, I would sometimes carry out overdue maintenance on a faithful black VW (a Beetle with seats removed, bed installed; carrying food, water, film, clothes, tripod, recorder and tools).

I recall the kindness of Sally Dixon and her honest concern for us filmmakers; she and James Blue together at the Pittsburgh house toiling over a plan to create free health insurance for all of us!

Gerald O'Grady in Buffalo, many visit, many shows, good times. He lived like an ascetic - 3 shirts, 3 pairs of black/navy blue socks, 3 trousers, one jacket, 2 or 3 ties, one worn pair of black shoes. Bed and briefcase. I slept in

his apartment once, but Buffalo had become too noisy for me. Stan B. and I visited there, speaking of ... our comings and goings. He had his small 8MM at the time. I presented Jerry with a general's star, from my boyhood collection. This was the last time I saw him.

To more or less confine this monograph, as Sherlock Holmes might have remarked - or this extended NEWS, to the earlier, California days, perhaps to conclude with a few more notes: We held our first official festival by returning to Canyon, it was about 1964. On the program were films by Stan Brakhage, Larry Jordan, myself, Ken Jacobs, Allen Downs (my University of MN teacher, later moved to Mexico), George Manupelli, Stan Vanderbeek, Ed Emshwiller, Jonas Mekas, Lloyd Williams, Gregory Markopoulos, Paul Beattie (who was another of the very early Bay Area filmmakers), Bruce Conner, Christopher Maclaine, Dave Myers, Marvin Becker, Will Hindle, Carl Linder, Jack Smith, Chick Strand, Michael Putnam, Ben Van Meter and others.

Ron Rice came through town with two ladies. It was to be his last run. They needed a room and some editing equipment, enroute to Mexico. Chicky and I visited them one evening, Ron editing in a corner, hanging his film on lines of women's undies strung across the room. He shot 50' rolls of surplus machine-gun film. He never returned from Old Mexico. His film, The Flower Thief was shown from the early 60's to the present.

In '64, Rockerfeller saved me from a debtor's life, in the final nick of time, as I was going into my best few years. I had moved north to live at Morning Star, 40 acres owned by Lou Gottlieb.*6 In the beginning there were only four of us, Lou, Ramon Sender (SF Tape Music Center), artist Wilder Bentley, and myself. We took turns cooking while Uncle Lou told us stories evenings by the great medieval fireplace. I rented a small cabin for my film work and set up a place to sleep with Mamma-dog under the trees with tarp, buffalo robe and lantern. We found our way at night by identifying the trees against the sky, to where the trail led off to the left, walking the next leg by memorizing the distance. Later, Morning Star was a famous commune. Lou willed the property "to God", arguing brilliantly in the local courts his right to allow free access to his land. Every word of the daily proceedings then was printed in the Santa Rosa paper.

Sometime in this period, or a bit later, (see original) Canyon Cinema moved to a sail loft in Sausalito and was run by a very nice woman, whose name was possibly Jan. At this time too, we had our Cinemateque ~~(sp?)~~ at the SF Art Institute. Edith Kramer, who is now at UC Film Archives, took over Canyon Cinema next and stayed for quite some time. Nearly everyone had a go at it through the years. God forgive me for not recalling her name.

Brakhages came to San Francisco for a year or so - early 60's - and were fondly embraced as a part of our lives and works at that time. I remember both Stan and Jane asking me directly, "Why are you doing all this?!" or some-such. I replied, "Because it needs doing -", which seemed to be a doubtful response, though it was the simple truth. I also recall asking Stan if I could borrow his B&H. "Yes," he said, "I would loan it to you if you asked, but I would never be able to use it again." I have since had to give a similar response to the same inquiry. A camera, like a horse, never works right again once loaned.*7

Charles Levine came to SF for a time. Bruce and Jean Conner showed up somewhere in our lives, I can't recall exactly when, though I believe they have lived at Sussex Street forever. Bruce Conner, a great all-round artist and athlete, also managed Canyon Cinema for a time. Charles was in San Francisco, as "Ambassador from New York" (Jonas Mekas' title) in 1966, where he made three films during his stay. In June of that year there occurred the founding of Canyon Cinema Cooperative, with meetings at the Haight Street Theatre and the SF Museum of Art. Among those involved in its formation at that time were filmmakers Ben Van Meter and Tom DeWitt, as well as Charles Levine, Larry Jordan, myself (at times), John Scofil (later director of the film dept., the Chicago Art Institute), Earl Bodien, Lenny Lipton,*8 and others. Earl and Charles were to author the first charter and settle the Co-op in an Haight Street rental: We had scheduled two rather large showings - according to Charles' information - one in San Francisco, the other at UC, Berkeley. Jonas Mekas generously contributed $1,000; along with another thousand, Canyon Cinema Cooperative, managed by Earl Bodien became a reality in the summer of 1966.

Robert Nelson came around before '66, when we were neighbors with the Tape Music Center. I recall Canyon premiering his ~~R. Nelson's~~ first works. Then Gunvor Nelson's films: with daughter, Oona, at their house by the sea north of the City ... where I stayed one night - the house guest in an Ingmar Bergman movie, visiting the lady guests in these various nooks and crannies of the marvelous manor of my memory. (Perhaps this was why for so many years I remained an uninvited guest at the SF Art Institute, in spite of their honorary MFA and my ~~?????? ????(pg. 8 on original, can't read)~~ seminar entitled, "Alternatives to Success," seminar. (Sorry).

"—and my infamous 'Alternatives to Success' seminar."

On and on -

Remembering things past - the mid-50's, after the University at Minnesota - Sally Stanford's, amongst the house boat community of Sausalito. Saturday nights riding across the Bay and Golden Gate Bridges on my Matchless twin, either to Sally's or North Beach's Old Spaghetti Factory - my friend and chef, Don ___, who was as well a former P-39 pilot. Perhaps sampling too many of the lovely wines, I

would stand on my head against the back of Sally Stanford's place or elsewhere in the darkness and do vertical push-ups in order to clear my head. This period, when I lived in the old Lydiksen house in Canyon which now haunts my dream life as archetypal home of the spirit.

Late 50's, (2sp.) Phyllis Diller was appearing at the Purple Onion in SF, while the former radio voice ... of the invisible Shadow was being murdered aboard his Sausalito houseboat.

In our early filmmaking years, the labs were especially helpful and often friendly: The elder Mac McKinney, of Multichrome on Gough Street helped get me underway, along with other original mentors already mentioned. At the time I had a 400' capacity Kodak projector that scratched film and my (new) Bolex. My first halting tests with the camera and exposure meter were on B&W Plus-X reversal, with my two dogs out on the beach, near the amusement center (I recall that lovely, classic merry-go-round). Mr. McKinney made beautiful EK prints (later of Castro Street, '66). Mac had a WC Fields nose, like a glass hen's egg in color - from long exposure to toxic photo chemistry. His son, Mac II took over for some years before Multichrome disappeared. He was also a good man. Somehow in the end there was great difficulty in recovering our various film originals.

Scott Bartlett and I met one sunny afternoon outside Multichrome - I had just delivered the A-B rolls for Mass. We went to his place and looked over his set-up, where he did re-shooting and high contrast color developing - I can't remember exactly how he was achieving his interesting effects. Scott lived with Freuda at the time - she too became a filmmaker and film distributor. Scott and Tom DeWitt worked together on Off-On. When I was ill in Ft. Bragg ('70), his dear sister came up north to stay awhile; she appears in Quick Billy.*9 She and her brother are among many friends in my life whom I shall never forget.

Other SF labs were, and are, WA Palmers and Monocco, (sorry!) both still doing good work. I have several quite decent S-VHS video masters made recently at Monocco. Palmers have done most of my printing: Ms. Kay Kibby was a wonderful help there for twenty years.

We filmed the protests against the atomic testing in the Pacific - the infamous SF Courthouse scenes: Shoulder to shoulder with the men in big suits (~~FBI~~ or CIA), "We know who you are" etc. The napalm trucks ~~came from north of~~ in & out of Berkeley. Day and night vigilling along the road. Footage somewhere in my archivery.

(! excl. mark)

(Martinez north of)

(2-L's?)

Ah yes, one more note. There still exists somewhere in Berkeley, an entire set of lovely blue mohair theater seats which belong to Canyon Cinema. Alas.

Another big thanks to Chicky Strand and to Dominic Angerame, Steve Anker, David and crew for carrying on after thirty-four years of Canyon Cinema, the subsequent and contemporary SF Cinemateque, and now and again an occasional NEWS! Apologies, finally, for what I may somehow have forgotten. I hope to atone in the current writing I am doing, now in a sixth year: Memoires of an Angel, a combination of narrative and autobiography.

Hellos to all from Lorie and daughter, Wind, on Camano Island.

— B.B.
date

8/17
And now
Thanks to
Antonella,
Seth &
friends!
- BB

Typing by _____ _____
(however you may wish to word it)

Footnotes.

1. Pg. 3. Yeh Tung. See the film, Tung, 1966.

2. Pg. 4. See All My Life, shot and recorded later in 1966 at Caspar.

3. Pg. 4. Scott MacDonald: A Critical Cinema 2, 1992, UC Press; Pg. 118 (Canyon Cinema logo, from the "Exothematic Method of Cure" - or Baunscheitism, late 19th/early 20th Century. Noted "Magicians admitted free." Unfortunately all this wonderful, spirited material gradually dropped away in the dullness, the drabness of the post-60's USA).

4. Pg. 5. To Parsifal.

5. Pg. 5. A biography is currently in the works by Ms. Diana Whatley, Tampa, FL., with the cooperation of an attorney in Huntsville, Ala. Funds for same are very much needed: Any assistance gratefully received c/o Canyon Cinema.

6. Pg. 8. A Doctor of musicology and member of the Limelighters, then retired near Sebastopol, CA, to pursue self-knowledge and open his property to others.

7. Pg. 9. At Bard College, Peter Kubelka was asked by an innocent student about the fun and the "wonder" of being able to carry a camera everywhere through one's life, to which he replied (roughly translated), "There is no fun in such committment, only toil and perhaps terror!" Also refer to the introduction to Stan Brakhages' published lectures, Chicago Art Institute.

8. Pg. 9. Lenny Lipton had a column in the Berkeley Barb, the only regular review & criticism of and for "independent cinema" at that time.

9. Pg. 10. Quick Billy, the title was given me by my old friend, Paul Tulley. Charlotte Todd (also appearing in the film), Paul & myself created Reel IV together.

with their luggage who were met by a Navy band and their relations. Great crews, nice environment, until the Vietnam War and its exigencies made it impossible to continue. We had introduced at Canyon, a door prize for every Berkeley showing - being quite often two randomly selected admissions to one of our favorite Finnish saunas (now disappeared from a more pleasant world, along with the redwood shingled architecture of 50's Berkeley). We gave away free bananas as well, and sometimes a cake baked by Chicky's daughter, Valery, and Tung's *1 daughter, Shima.

Enter Chick Callenback, then literary editor with UC Press and editor of Film Quarterly, his own periodical of film criticism. Chick C. offered a backyard and his small shed by the creek that ran through parts of Berkeley. By this time we had in mind founding a community equipment facility - this was our (impoverished) beginning - the idea never became a viable reality in the U.S. as far as I am aware.

The News was Chick - Ernest Callenbach's invention, set into motion as a monthly, I believe, later a quarterly - about 1963. My mother, Gladys Baillie, managed the accounting and mailing, etc. We would gather together at mailing time to assemble, staple, fold and address the News, contributing the funds ourselves as we did toward paying our film rental bills, beyond audience contributions from film showings. My mom usually made cookies for these events. As time went by, the News developed into a major part of Canyon's attentions, especially when we wrote it up in Caspar and Mendocino*2: "The Blackberry Tarts Division," with Paul and Nancy Tulley, reports on kite duels above Caspar Flats, and all sorts of wonderment. This is where I first met Michael Wallin, a summer session with the Mendocino Art Center. The News had various editors including a few issues in high contrast process by Carl Linder. A complete set of early Canyon Cinema News is with the Canyon archives in SF, there are also copies with Film Arts Foundation according to the new News, Sept. '94: #94-1. I left a pile of this material with Canyon when I was obliged to leave California in the later 70's. Recently wrote a letter to Canyon suggesting we try and reprint the early News, perhaps, and offer them for sale, mail to members, etc. We need a T-shirt with the original "Canyon Cinema man" as design!*3

I recall a showing we gave at a junior college out by Walnut Creek, of Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures, requested by the administration, or "Deanery": A dry, hot day, windy - the sort of day one might recall from youth on a date with a girl three years and three inches taller than himself. Offering a (large) Baby Ruth, which in the 40's was 10¢ cents, that would rapidly become both limpid and melty - the theater smelling on hot afternoons of upstairs toilets and buttered popcorn. Yet there was a kind of inexorable fatality to it, sitting there, sweaty pants stuck to the

led off to the left, walking the next leg by memorizing the distance. Later, Morning Star was a famous commune. Lou willed the property "to God", arguing brilliantly in the local courts his right to allow free access to his land. Every word of the daily proceedings then was printed in the Santa Rosa paper. xtra?

Sometime in this period, or a bit later, Canyon Cinema moved to a sail loft in Sausalito and was run by a very nice woman, whose name was possibly Jan, God forgive me for not recalling her name. At this time too, we had our Cinemateque at the SF Art Institute. Edith Kramer, who is now at UC Film Archives, took over Canyon Cinema next and stayed for quite some time. Nearly everyone had a go at it through the years.

Brakhages came to San Francisco for a year or so - early 60's - and were fondly embraced as a part of our lives and works at that time. I remember both Stan and Jane asking me directly, "Why are you doing all this?!" or some such. I replied, "Because it needs doing -", which seemed to be a doubtful response, though it was the simple truth. I also recall asking Stan if I could borrow his B&H. "Yes," he said, "I would loan it to you if you asked, but I would never be able to use it again." I have since had to give a similar response to the same inquiry. A camera, like a horse, never works right again once loaned.*7

Charles Levine came to SF for a time. Bruce and Jean Conner showed up somewhere in our lives, I can't recall exactly when, though I believe they have lived at Sussex Street forever. Bruce Conner, a great all-round artist and athlete, also managed Canyon Cinema for a time. Charles was in San Francisco, as "Ambassador from New York" (Jonas Mekas' title) in 1966, where he made three films during his stay. In June of that year there occurred the founding of Canyon Cinema Cooperative, with meetings at the Haight Street Theatre and the SF Museum of Art. Among those involved in its formation at that time were filmmakers Ben Van Meter and Tom DeWitt, as well as Charles Levine, Larry Jordan, myself (at times), John Scofil (later director of the film dept., the Chicago Art Institute), Earl Bodien, Lenny Lipton,*8 and others. Earl and Charles were to author the first charter
and settle the Co-op in an Haight Street rental: We had scheduled two rather large showings - according to Charles' information - one in San Francisco, the other at UC, Berkeley. Jonas Mekas generously contributed $1,000; along with another thousand, Canyon Cinema Cooperative, managed by Earl Bodien became a reality in the summer of 1966.

Robert Nelson came around before '66, when we were neighbors with the Tape Music Center. I recall Canyon premiering his first works. Then Gunvor Nelson's films: with daughter, Oona, at their house by the sea north of the

various nooks and crannies of that marvelous manor of my memory. (Perhaps this was why for so many years I remained an uninvited guest at the SF Art Institute, in spite of their honorary MFA and my infamous seminar, "Alternatives to Success.")

Xtra?

On and on -

Remembering things past - the mid-50's, after the University at Minnesota - Sally Stanford's, amongst the house boat community of Sausalito. Saturday nights riding across the Bay and Golden Gate Bridges on my Matchless twin, either to Sally's or North Beach's Old Spaghetti Factory - my friend and chef, Don ___, who was as well a former P-39 pilot. Perhaps sampling too many of the lovely wines, I would stand on my head against the back of Sally Stanford's place or elsewhere in the darkness and do vertical push-ups in order to clear my head. This period, when I lived in the old Lydiksen house in Canyon which now haunts my dream life as archetypal home of the spirit.

Late 50's. Phyllis Diller was appearing at the Purple Onion in SF, while the former radio voice ... of the invisible Shadow was being murdered aboard his Sausalito houseboat.

In our early filmmaking years, the labs were especially helpful and often friendly: The elder Mac McKinney, of Multichrome on Gough Street helped get me underway, along with other original mentors already mentioned. At the time I had a 400' capacity Kodak projector that scratched film and my (new) Bolex. My first halting tests with the camera and exposure meter were on B&W Plus-X reversal, with my two dogs out on the beach, near the amusement center (I recall that lovely, classic merry-go-round). Mr. McKinney made beautiful EK prints (later of Castro Street, '66). Mac had a WC Fields nose, like a glass hen's egg in color - from long exposure to toxic photo chemistry. His son, Mac II took over for some years before Multichrome disappeared. He was also a good man. Somehow in the end there was great difficulty in recovering our various film originals.

Scott Bartlett and I met one sunny afternoon outside Multichrome - I had just delivered the A-B rolls for Mass. We went to his place and looked over his set-up, where he did re-shooting and high contrast color developing - I can't remember exactly how he was achieving his interesting effects. Scott lived with Freuda at the time - she too became a filmmaker and film distributor. Scott and Tom DeWitt worked together on Off-On. When I was ill in Ft.-Bragg ('70), his dear sister came up north to stay awhile; she appears in Quick Billy.*9 She and her brother are among many friends in my life whom I shall never forget.

Other SF labs were, and are, WA Palmers and Monoco, both still doing good work. I have several quite decent

City ... where I stayed one night - the house guest in an Ingmar Bergman movie, visiting the lady guests in those various nooks and crannies of that marvelous manor of my memory. (Perhaps this was why for so many years I remained an uninvited guest at the SF Art Institute, in spite of their honorary MFA and my infamous seminar, "Alternatives to Success.")

On and on -

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Xtra

11

Other SF labs were, and are, WA Palmers and Monoco, both still doing good work. I have several quite decent S-VHS video masters made recently at Monoco. Palmers have done most of my printing: Ms. Kay Kibby was a wonderful help there for twenty years.

We filmed the protests against atomic testing in the Pacific - the infamous SF Courthouse scenes: Shoulder to shoulder with the men in big suits (FBI or CIA), "We know who you are!" etc. The napalm trucks came in and out of Martine , north of Berkeley. Day and night vigiling along the road. Footage somewhere in my archivery.

Ah yes, one more note. There still exists somewhere in Berkeley, an entire set of lovely blue mohair theater seats which belong to Canyon Cinema. Alas.

Another big thanks to Chicky Strand and to Dominic Angerame, Steve Anker, David and crew for carrying on after thirty-four years of Canyon Cinema, the subsequent and contemporary SF Cinemateque, and now and again an occasional NEWS! Apologies, finally, for what I may somehow have forgotten. I hope to atone in the current writing I am doing, now in a sixth year: Memoires of an Angel, a combination of narrative and autobiography.

Hellos to all from Lorie and daughter, Wind in Camano Island.

B.B.

Oct. 10, 1994

Hi Bruce!

Hope things are well out here on your island.

Here's my intro to The Canyon Cavemen book. Could you read it & check for mistakes, errors of fact, etc.

Best, Scott (MacDonald)

P.S. If you want to say more about the origins, write down your thoughts & I'll work them in.

Introduction

By the 1920s, once the commercial narrative feature film had established its economic preeminence within early film history, the pervasive experimentation that had characterized the first two decades of film history tended to be redirected, roughly speaking, into two different avenues. Many of those who had explored the possibilities of cinematic form and style in the wake of the early experiments of the Edison Studio, the Lumière brothers, and Georges Méliès became lieutenants in the service of the generals of industry feature films. Others established an alternative history of cinema that explicitly and/or implicitly critiqued the growing hegemony of the commercial feature and the audience it was creating.[1] This alternative history developed in various places and at various moments. In Europe and in the United States during the 1920s many visual artists explored the possibilities of using the movie camera as an instrument to extend their forays into expressionism, abstraction, dadaism, and surrealism. In Russia, new, experimental forms of dialectically edited film revealed attempts to celebrate and cinematically embody the "dialectic materialist" underpinnings of the Revolution of 1915 and of the new Communist Russia. During the 1930s in the United Kingdom and the United States, filmmakers frustrated with the problems of unbridled capitalism worked at creating new worker-oriented forms of cinema. In the United States the 1940s saw the emergence of the "psychodrama"–cinematic dramatizations of disturbed states of mind–and a wide variety of new forms of abstraction; and by the 1950s and 1960s a full-fledged critical cinema movement (variously called "experimental film," "the New American Cinema," "underground film," "avant-garde film"–depending on the orientations and interests of particular critics and chroniclers) had emerged.

In retrospect we can read the development of alternative forms of cinema as something like a coherent aesthetic history, and as a history that reveals particular relationships with the social developments that surrounded it. Each form of cinema that became preeminent at a particular moment seems to relate in a variety of ways to the alternative forms of cinema that preceded and succeeded it, and each form seems to have responded in a somewhat different way

to the realties of modern society.[2] However, whatever social or aesthetic influences now seem formative, it is important to remember that the evolution of alternative cinema was determined not simply by the quantity and quality of the films that were produced within any given moment and set of circumstances, but also by the extent to which whatever films did get produced were seen by audiences and by the nature of these audiences. And further, both the production of films that provided an ongoing critique of the film industry and modern society *and* the evolution of audiences for alternative forms of cinema were largely dependent upon the efforts of a very few far-sighted and often courageous individuals who believed that alternative cinema was important enough--ideologically and/or aesthetically and/or economically--to deserve regular, dependable distribution, and saw various forms of alternative film distribution into being..

At Canyon's Edge: The Life and Times of a (Wildly) Independent Film Distributor is an attempt to honor and historicize what became Canyon Cinema, a remarkable achievement in film distribution that evolved during the 1960s in response to the repressive and conformist tendencies of 1950s America and the way in which the mainstream media of that moment, especially film and television, tended to confirm these tendencies. Beginning as an informal exhibition alternative, Canyon Cinema developed into a three-pronged attack on the conventional film scene. Alternative exhibition–that is, the exhibition of forms of cinema not available in commercial theaters or on television–remained an important component of Canyon's work until the 1970s, when its exhibition function became the San Francisco Cinematheque.[3] Canyon's efforts to create a nationwide network of cineastes through its publication of a newsletter that supplied information about alternative film production and exhibition practices helped to establish the "underground" that for a time in the mid-to-late 1960s seemed poised to offer a challenge to the struggling Hollywood film industry.

But most important for our purposes here, Canyon's establishment of an artist-run film distribution organization in San Francisco that could serve Bay Area independent filmmakers and, later, filmmakers from across the country and across the globe, created a lasting model for those who are committed to alternatives to commercial culture. During the past forty years, Canyon has evolved into the most dependable distributor of alternative cinema in the United States, and it has done so without betraying the fundamental principles on which it was founded. If the youthful exuberance and idealism that fueled Canyon's early years–note the nude pyramid of the Canyon Board of Directors (on p. XXX)!–now can seem a vestige of a long-gone moment

of utopian excess, Canyon Cinema distribution is one of those rare instances where the "counter culture" of the 1960s has proved, and continues to prove, its long term value. Canyon has shown itself to be dependable both for filmmakers and for those who rent the films in Canyon's extensive collection.

Of the three processes that deliver finished films to the audiences that pay to see them—production, distribution, and exhibition—distribution is certainly the least discussed and the least appreciated. Of course, in the case of mass-market entertainment films the process of distribution seems virtually automatic and becomes visible only if we live in places where some of the films we hope to see are unavailable. Indeed, the industrial production of cinema has always depended on an efficient nationwide and international distribution system.[4] But the moment we consider the full range of film experience—and, in particular, critical forms of film—distribution and exhibition can never be taken for granted.[5] Even the front rank of features made outside the Hollywood industry rarely get widely distributed in the United States—though they may find their way to specialized exhibition outlets in a few major cities and may be celebrated at film festivals. And when it comes to all those forms of film that have struggled to attract enough of a paying public to assure a substantial profit, opportunities for distribution beyond a local, coterie audience have been few and far between.

Of course, no one who is familiar with the full range of film history could fail to understand that the quality of a film has little to do with its being widely available; and if this is clear even in the world of commercial cinema, it is painfully obvious in that wide world of cinema that provides critiques of mass media and its audience—and nearly always has been. During the 1920s there was a good bit of interest in "amateur film." Once Eastman Kodak had introduced 16mm film in 1924, this interest resulted in thousands of amateur filmmakers, a network of amateur film clubs, the Amateur Cinema League, a small network of "Little Theaters," and what Jan Christopher Horak calls "the first American film avant-garde.[6] For a time, apparently, there were efforts at distributing amateur cinema through the network of clubs and Little Theaters. By the 1930s, however, the Great Depression had limited theatrical distribution of anything but commercial films, though the amateur movie clubs continued to be active. According to Patricia R. Zimmermann, "The Amateur Cinema League . . . had two hundred fifty amateur-cinema clubs on its rolls by 1937"; and its yearly "Ten-Best" contests insured some distribution for a few of the amateur films.[7] Also, for a time the various workers'

movements of the 1930s created distribution opportunities for certain forms of leftist-oriented documentary and propaganda.[8] In general, however, it seems clear in retrospect that the lack of distribution for anything other than features and shorts made for the nationwide commercial theater chains contributed to the general failure of even those films that did get made, by serious amateurs and by artists working with film, to achieve widespread recognition and influence in this country.

By the mid-1940s it had become clear to a few imaginative cineastes that there was probably an audience, and might be enough films, to support an alternative to the commercial theaters. First, Frank Stauffacher in San Francisco and, soon after, Amos and Marcia Vogel in New York decided to see if the European film society (or "ciné-club") movement might find purchase in the United States, and in both cases, this exhibition gamble met with considerable success.[9] By the end of the decade thousands of filmgoers were regularly attending the presentations at Art in Cinema (Stauffacher's film society) and Cinema 16 (the Vogels'), and by the 1950s their efforts had helped to instigate a nationwide network of film societies.[10] Both Stauffacher and the Vogels struggled to assemble their programs, since few distribution outlets were available. Both were in large measure dependent on the Museum of Modern Art, which had begun to distribute a range of films in 1936,[11] and on word of mouth, which alerted them to new films being produced. Vogel, who was committed to a wider range of documentary than Stauffacher (for example, Vogel regularly showed films produced by and for physicians, psychotherapists, and for use in educational institutions) also became familiar with the various film distribution organizations that serviced these fields. But as the film society idea swept across the country, it became increasingly clear that new distribution systems were needed to service the growing film society audience.

Beginning in the late 1940s Vogel began to distribute selected avant-garde films and documentaries, and in 1951, he produced his first brochure announcing the availability of "20 Experimental/Rental Films, from Cinema 16." Vogel was not alone in trying to cater to this new audience for educational and artistic cinema. Tom Brandon had begun distributing political films in the 1930s; by the 1940s he was distributing a range of documentaries, as well as dance films and films about art, and by 1950 was, somewhat grudgingly, including a few avant-garde films in the Brandon catalogue: *Rhythm in Light* (1934; Mary Ellen Bute, Ted Nemeth, Melville F. Webber) and *Fiddle-De-Dee* (1947; Norman McLaren) were included in the 1950 catalogue;

three films by Curtis Harrington—*Fragment of Seeking* (1946), *Picnic* (1948), *On the Edge* (1949)—and *Ai-Ye* (1951) by Ian Hugo were added by 1953.[12] Rosalind Kossoff distributed English versions of French documentaries through A.F. Films; Audio Film Classics in San Francisco included a number of experimental documentaries in their 1954 catalogue (including *The Private Life of a Cat* [1945] by Alexander Hammid; Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* [1934]; *Notes on the Port of St. Francis* [1952] by Frank Stauffacher; and *The City* [1939] by Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke); and Leo Dratfield's Contemporary Films distributed art films and social documentaries, including experimental documentaries (*The Private Life of a Cat*, *Song of Ceylon*, *The City*, and *The Quiet One* [1948] by Sidney Meyers and Janice Loeb), a number of what Dratfield called "Cinema 16 Films"—e.g., *The Cage* (1947, Sidney Peterson); *Psyche* (1947), *Lysis* (1948), and *Charmides* (1948) by Gregory Markopoulos—and several of Maya Deren's films.[13]

Particularly important for Canyon was Bob Pike's Creative Film Society, which was founded in 1957 in Los Angeles, for nearly the same set of purposes that was to instigate Canyon itself: as explained by Pike himself, these efforts included "consolidating the efforts of the individual West Coast filmartists in terms of aiding closer communication of ideas, films, and equipment, as well as distributing the finished works of the members."[14] The Creative Film Society shared a number of clients with Canyon: Pike's first catalogue included Stan Brakhage and Larry Jordan (later, when Canyon Cinema incorporated, Jordan became its first president), and its rental collection grew until 1975, when it included some four hundred films. Not surprisingly, Pike was interested in Canyon from early on, and for a time, regularly contributed substantial reports to the *Cinemanews* (several are included in this volume). His confident response to Robert Nelson's claim that he was a crass businessman who had treated Nelson and his films disrespectfully (see pp. XXX) was predicated on his long experience as an independent distributor committed to some of the same goals as Canyon.

All of these distribution outlets had one thing in common: they were organized so that the distributors decided which particular films they would distribute. Further, all were committed to providing a profit-making service, and asked filmmakers to sign exclusive contracts that provided filmmakers with a percentage (usually less than 50%) of rental revenues. While many filmmakers were grateful that *someone* was willing to take the chance of distributing at least some of their films, by the end of the 1950s there was also a move afoot to develop distribution

possibilities that would be controlled by the filmmakers themselves. For Jonas Mekas and a number of others, the idea that Amos Vogel, or anyone else, should become the arbitor of which of a film artist's films should get to be seen by the public was increasingly untenable, and on September 28, 1960, the New American Cinema Group met to consider alternatives: by 1962 the New York Film-maker's Cooperative was publishing its own catalogue and suggesting to potential exhibitors that they consider offering programs of films by individual film artists, rather than the "pot pourri programs" usually offered by film societies.[15]

The Film-makers' Cooperative was, and remains, an artist-run organization. From the beginning, it provided filmmakers with the opportunity for passive distribution of any or all the films the filmmakers wanted to make available to exhibitors. This distribution was "passive" in the sense that while the Film-makers' Cooperative was committed to producing a catalogue of films-for-rent, all filmmakers were considered equal and no film or filmmaker was to receive more attention from the distributor than any other. The "Coop" would not do any sort of advertising or promotion for particular films or filmmakers. Of course, if filmmakers wanted to promote their own films, that was fine, but the Cooperative's job was to maintain prints, take orders from exhibitors, and provide a listing of films available, along with descriptions supplied by the film artists themselves, plus the coop's rental terms. The lower overhead achieved by passive distribution, it was assumed, would allow for a more generous percentage of the rental to go to the filmmakers: the Film-makers' Cooperative began with a 75/25% split of rental monies, the 25% coming back to the Coop to cover its costs. The assumption was that those who worked at the Coop would receive a decent wage, but that the organization would not profit from the service it provided beyond maintaining its viability as a distributor.[16]

The New York Film-maker's Cooperative was the first cooperative distribution outlet to establish itself, but it was only a single instance of an idea whose time had come: groups of independent filmmakers in various parts of this country, and in Europe and Japan, faced with the same problem of how to make their films available to those interested in showing them were coming to conclusion that some sort of cooperative distribution might be useful. The formation of the New York Film-makers' Cooperative proved that filmmaker-run distribution was possible, and other groups, here and abroad, followed its lead. Canyon was the most long-lived and influential of the American filmmaker-run distributors to emulate the New York Coop. Canyon was formed in San Francisco in 1966: at the beginning it was called the Canyon Cinema

Cooperative.[17] If it was established in the shadow of the New York cooperative, in its more than forty years of operation, Canyon Cinema has proved itself the model organization of its kind, both for the filmmakers and for those who use Canyon's service. While the percentage of revenues returned to the filmmakers has varied from the original 75/25 split (since 2001 the split has been 50/50), filmmakers, so far as I have been able to determine, have *always* received the rentals their films have generated.[18] Further, Canyon has a particularly good record of providing good 16mm prints in a timely fashion.[19]

Canyon Cinema did not begin as a distribution cooperative, but rather as an unusually conceived exhibition outlet just north of Berkeley. Filmmaker Bruce Baillie was the instigator of Canyon Cinema, and he has described its origins:

> We started Canyon Cinema about 1960, in Canyon, California, over the hills from Oakland and Berkeley. Kikuko [Baillie's partner at the time] was paying the rent and giving me the chance to free up my time to make films. Immediately I realized that making films and showing films must go hand in hand, so I got a job at Safeway, took out a loan and bought a projector. We got an army surplus screen and hung it up real nice in the back yard of this house we were renting. Then we'd find whatever films we could, including our own little things that were in progress—"we," there wasn't really any we, just myself for awhile—and show them.
>
> So I made a *thing* of it. I had no occupation. I couldn't get a real job anywhere. So I thought, I'll invent my own occupation. I set up a little part of the house as an office. I had to call it something: I put up a little sign and it turned out to be "Canyon Cinema" with a light bulb next to it. Fairly soon, we had weekly showings. Kikuko made popcorn. The kids around the neighborhood gathered the community benches and chairs, and we'd sit under the trees in the summer with all the dogs and people and watch French or Canadian Embassy films and National Film Board of Canada stuff, along with our own. I let it be known immediately that I had a place to show films, if any filmmakers were coming through town. I let Jonas [Mekas] know right away. At first we were in touch with Larry Jordan, and later, Jordan Belson."[20]

As Canyon Cinema evolved, Baillie was joined by others—most notably filmmaker Chick Strand, and Chick Callenbach (longtime editor of *Film Quarterly* and author of *Ecotopia* [1975])—and the screenings moved from place to place, first into Berkeley, and then to San Francisco as well. Because there was so little precedent for the kinds of screenings Baillie did, and so much suspicion of "underground film," the biggest problem was finding a space where Canyon could present films without fear of being shut down by the local authorities. In fact, Callenbach became involved in 1961 when Baillie "began telling me how . . . the fire marshalls were always after them. You know, you rent some hall and then it would turn out it didn't have enough exits. And it wouldn't have toilets. And they'd close you down.... They had tried schools, and they had done a lot of things, and none of them had really worked. So they were really desperate for a place to show."[21] While the original screenings in Canyon had been sporadic, by 1961-1962 Baillie, Strand, Callenbach, and others—Paul Tulley, Wes Patterson, Dave Cleveland, and a little later Emory Menefee—had made Canyon a regular, if still rather nomadic showcase, sometimes presenting as many as three events a week, "one in San Francisco, one in Oakland, and one in Berkeley which for a time was in our [Chick and Paul Strand's] front room."[22] Another of the venues was Bistro San Martin, an anarchist restaurant in Berkeley, and still another, Chick Callenbach's back yard in Berkeley. Callenbach remembers:

> We would set up Bruce's old projector and a screen of some kind on the other end of the yard, and invite all the neighbors--because the soundtracks were often pretty raucous, of course. And people would come in. It was really a neat scene because Chicky Strand, who had, and probably still has, a real sense of drama would wear a kind of witchy cloak and her long black hair down, and she would sit with a couple of candles in the garage that went through from the street to my back yard, and that was the "box office." She would collect the money and chat with people, and then they'd go on in, bringing sleeping bags and jugs of wine and so on. They'd sort of crash all over the deck and after awhile we'd show the films to maybe thirty or forty people. Not immense, but enough—and they were pretty regular; they would come...maybe once a month. Some of them helped out with Canyon operation in some way, but most people just showed up, hoping to see something unusual.[23] **[Image of Chick Strand]**

According to Callenbach, Baillie would often begin the program with a Castle Film he had found or brought, followed by local experimental films, including his own, and films from the East Coast and elsewhere. Evenings might end with the award of a door prize (a ticket to the presentation included a chance to win the prize), which might be a pie that Baillie had made, or tickets to a steam bath. Strand remembers, "It was a real family kind of thing."[24]

Though the early Canyon Cinema community-oriented screenings evolved into a somewhat nomadic set of events, the nature of those earliest screenings have continued to have influence; indeed, they were one of the primary influences on what has recently become known as the "microcinema" movement—a nationwide network of small, almost familial screening-rooms. One of the major instigators of the microcinema movement was San Francisco's Total Mobile Home, a collaboration of Rebecca Barton and David Sherman, who hosted filmmakers and film shows in their home, once a week, from 1994 until 1997. For Barton and Sherman, Baillie's original Canyon Cinema was a crucial influence: "In fact one of our early shows (in 1994) at Total Mobile Home was a series of morning salons with Bruce Baillie where that connection was dialogued."[25] Barton also remembers that when she was first discovering and exploring avant-garde cinema, as a student at the University of Maryland, the Canyon Cinema Catalogues were "great delicacies."[26] Sherman worked for Canyon from 1988 until 2000.

Baillie's vision of Canyon as a kind of village nexus, an essentially spiritual gathering that could bring diverse people together, was obvious in the nature of the early Canyon screenings, but it also led to other activities and services as well, including both production facilities and the creation of local "news" outlets. When Chick Callenbach moved to a new home with a large basement, Baillie and Callenbach transformed the basement into editing facilities: "Bruce edited *To Parsifal* [1963] there and worked on a couple of other films briefly; we were trying to make it a sort of anarchists' cutting room, where anybody who needed to borrow each other's equipment could come and work and schmooz and help each other."[27] Baillie's instinct seems always to have been collaborative and communal. In fact, Larry Jordan recalls that when Baillie received a Ford Foundation grant (sometime before 1968), "He sent me a thousand dollars out of it, which paid for the soundtrack of my long, dramatic *Hildur and the Magician* [1969]. Whenever I tried to express my gratitude, Bruce didn't want to hear anything about it; he just thought that's the way things should be. At that time, a thousand dollars bought a lot of film services."[28]

Baillie's vision for Canyon also included regular access to news about the local community that surrounded Canyon's screenings. Baillie himself began filming "news items" early on and presented these at the screenings. *David Lynn's Sculpture* (1961) was one of Baillie's first films: "a newsreel of David Lynn's *big* log sculpture, made for the first Canyon Cinema up in Canyon."[29] Others include *Friend Fleeing* (1962; "I was leaving Canyon one day to go on a little trip, so I made a little film for everybody"); *Mr. Hayashi* (1961), a portrait of a neighbor, "A real, living saint," as Baillie describes him in an early Canyon Cinema distribution catalogue, and later on, *Termination* (by "Canyon Cinema Documentary Film Unit," according to catalogue notes for the film), made for a small community of Indian people near Laytonville, California. The desire to draw the Canyon community together by providing information also resulted in the establishment of *The News*, later called *The Canyon Cinema News* and *The Cinemanews*—over the years the title underwent several variations.[30] *The News* was Callenbach's idea. As editor of *Film Quarterly*, he frequently received information about film projects and events that was not suitable for an academic quarterly, but would be of interest and use to the independent film community. The first issue of *The News*, edited by Alexandra Ossipoff, was published in December of 1962. *The News* quickly became a valuable source of information about film festivals, film projects underway, scheduled screenings of independent work, contact information for filmmakers, distributors, and exhibitors—and in time, it included interviews, articles, poems, drawings, and debates.

By the mid-1960s, Canyon was evolving into a three-part service to the community of independent filmmakers and cineastes. Emory Menefee, a research chemist working at a Department of Agriculture office in the Bay Area, was overseeing Canyon's exhibition program, at various San Francisco venues, most notably at Intersection (then at 150 Ellis Street). The mixture of pop and avant-garde film that had characterized Baillie's early Canyon programming had been replaced by a more complete focus on avant-garde film and especially on one-person shows presented by film artists. Menefee oversaw Canyon's exhibition program from 1965 until the end of July, 1967. In November, 1967, Canyon screenings resumed with a new moniker, "the Canyon Cinematheque," under the directorship of Edith Kramer, Loren Sears, and Roy Ramsing. Screenings were still held at Intersection (it had moved to 756 Union Street). According to Steve Anker (who was director of the Cinematheque from 1980 until 2002), in the late 1960s screenings became extremely popular; and seem to have recaptured something of the anarchic

spirit of the early Canyon screenings organized by Baillie, Strand, and Callenbach: "programming was egalitarian, with films frequently selected spontaneously while the events were in progress. Wacky door prizes, free drinks and popcorn, and lively masters of ceremonies (most notably filmmaker Anne Severson) added to the party atmosphere."[31] **[posters for Canyon screenings at Intersection]**

The News was "edited"—during the early years there was little editing per se; news items would be collected or submitted, and the *News* "editors" would see that they were typed up, reproduced, and distributed—first, by Ossipoff, then by Margaret Kerr (1963, issues 2-6), Chick Strand (1963, issues 7-9), Lillian Thibodeau (1963, issues 10-11; 1964, issues 1-4), and Strand again (1964, issue 5). From September, 1964 until the March-April 1966 issue, no editor is listed in *The News* itself, but presumably Baillie oversaw these issues: the March, 1966 issue announces, "In Bruce's absence, this month's News is being put out by Emory Menefee and next month Robert Nelson will take it." The Nelson issue (June, 1966) was followed by an issue entirely devoted to drawings by Neon Park; and then, from August, 1966 until the March-April, 1967 issue, again, no editor is listed. As of May 1967, Menefee took over and remained the *News* editor until his resignation in 1970.

In the November, 1966 issue, *The News* announced that a distribution cooperative had been formed: "In its sixth year, Canyon Cinema felt the need to establish an independent film distribution office on the West Coast of North America to better serve the needs of film-makers in that part of the world. That facility came into existence on the 14th day of August, 1966, in the wake of the pioneer Film-maker's Coop [in New York City] and in this year of new Co-ops in London and Boston and rumored Co-ops in Chicago, Philadelphia, Austin, Rome and Paris." Something of Bruce Baillie's sweet, spiritual anarchism is evident in the announcement's description of the Coop members: "Canyon Cinema Co-op is a federation of willing devotees of the magic lantern muse, consisting of artists engaged in the creation of 16mm films, 8mm film and other related light and image projection media. The devotees have a policy of non-policy, and are subject to only the barest and most basic 'procedures' for co-operatively distributing their films or informing likely audiences of their light-projection capacities" (see pp. XX for the entire announcement). The announcement outlines the process for renting and buying prints of films, then lists the filmmakers and their films available for rent—a total of thirty-one filmmakers and seventy-five films (plus one audiotape). Only six of the filmmakers—Baillie,

Robert Feldman, Larry Jordan, Robert Nelson, Ben Van Meter, and Michael K. Wiese—listed more than one or two films, and only Jordan offered a substantial number of films (19).

It is symptomatic of the committed, but unmercenary temper of the Canyon group that they list all the distributors for each of the films offered for rental/sale in their catalogue *and* include, at the end of the News, an equally detailed listing of independent films "*not* available, at this time, from Canyon Cinema Co-operative." Until Canyon incorporated on February 26th, 1967, the distribution operation was handled by Earl Bodien (two of Bodien's films were listed in the Catalogue), who stored the prints in his living room. Lenny Lipton, an early Canyon board member (also a filmmaker whose films were distributed by Canyon, and the author of two breakthrough books, *Independent Filmmaking* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973]; and *The Super-8 Book* [New York: Fireside, 1975]), remembers Bodien's "funcky little apartment in a little house near Howard Street, an area that's utterly gentrified now," which doubled as Canyon's everyday office and its meeting place: "sometimes at meetings we would enjoy Earl's manipulating a normal television broadcast using several magnets. *Earl* was the one who *did the work*; he was very steady and I'm sure that without Earl's participation there would have been no Canyon distribution."[32]

A catalogue of films for rent was included in the November, 1966 *News*; and this catalogue was reproduced in December, 1966 as *Catalogue Number One* of the Canyon Cinema Cooperative (sixeen, two-sided, 8 ½" x 11" pages stapled together). This simple listing must have served a considerable need, at least judging from the fact that two years later *Catalogue Number Two* was a 128-page listing of nearly five-hundred films by 165 filmmakers (published, with the help of "the [financial] contributions of Jonas Mekas and the American Film Institute"). *Catalogue Number Two* was followed quickly by *Catalogue Number Two, Supplement Number One* (1969), then by *Catalogue 2, Supplement 2* (1970), and *Catalogue 2, Supplement 3* (1970).[33] Spring, 1972 saw the publication of *Catalogue 3*, a full-sized (8 ½" x 11"; *Catalogue Number Two* and its several supplements had been 6"x 9"), 218-page listing of filmmakers and their films for rent and sale, in which filmmakers could—if they wished—design the catalogue pages listng their films. Though a majority of filmmakers declined, enough did design their own listings to give the catalogue a rather anarchic feel and to offer potential rentors something of an adventure. The sanguine mood at Canyon at the time is suggested by the fact that seven thousand copies of

the 1972 catalogue were printed.[34] From November, 1966, *The News* regularly listed new films available from Canyon.

When Diane Kitchen became Canyon's manager in 1973, she was convinced that the look of *Catalogue 3* was largely responsible for the fall-off of rentals during the early 1970s, and quickly put plans in motion for what became *Catalogue 4*, which was published in 1976. *Catalogue 4* did include photographic and graphic imagery supplied by the filmmakers, but only in special sections set off from the listing of filmmakers/films **[Adam Beckett image (m14)]**; and it also included, at the end, a "subject index" in which the "filmmakers…selected the categories that they feel best describes their film(s)" (for example, "abstract," "animals," "animation," "assemblage/collage," "autobiographical," "children," "cine poems," "comedy"…), an attempt to assist potential rentors find their way into the catalogue and access the films best suited to their particular circumstances. *Catalogue 4* was also the first listing since *Catalogue 2, Supplement 2* not to list 8mm films separately from 16mm films. New catalogues continued to appear with some regularity.[35]

The fast-developing interest in alternative forms of film in the mid-to-late 1960s quickly rendered Earl Bodien's living room inadequate for maintaining the films available from Canyon, and by 1967 it was clear that the organization required a higher level of professionalism. In 1967 Bodien and Larry Jordan signed Canyon's incorporation papers. The papers named Jordan the President of "Canyon Cinema, Inc. (A Non-Profit Corporation)," and Bodien, Secretary; and established a Board of Directors to be elected by the members ("any film maker or any one interested in film making shall be eligible to apply for membership in the corporation"). The Articles of Incorporation list Jordan, Ben Van Meter, Robert Nelson, and Bruce Baillie as directors "until the selection of their successors." When the first election was held, five Directors were chosen: Larry Jordan, Lenny Lipton, Emory Menefee, Loren Sears, and Ben Van Meter. The original address of Canyon Cinema, Inc. was 58 Verona Place, San Francisco—Bodien's address—but in 1967, when Bodien left San Francisco to move back to the Midwest, Canyon moved to the basement of a defunct church at 756 Union Street, where Jordan and Robert Nelson built storage space and an office for Edith Kramer who had been working with Bodien for some months and was asked by the Board to take over the day-to-day running of Canyon distribution: "Edith," Jordan remembers, "was very hands-on and right there, and very capable; she got to make most of the decisions. The whole idea of forming the Coop was to get

somebody else to take the burden of distribution off our [the filmmakers'] shoulders; we were very lucky Edith took the job."[36] Beginning in the fall of 1968 (in undated issue no. 68.7) the minutes of Board of Directors' meetings were published in what was now being called the *Canyon Cinemanews*.

The first item of business at the September 4, 1968 meeting was a bit of bad news: "In order to qualify for non-profit status, the Coop will have to reorganize. The Internal Revenue Service has refused our request for non-profit status." In the discussion that followed, it was clear that "Non-profit status is important for attracting grant money…special mailing rates, etc. The Coop under IRS regulations will never be able to qualify it is clear. We will, have to split into at least two organizations…" It would be nearly a decade (1977) before Canyon would bifurcate into the distribution organization, which retained the "Canyon Cinema" name, and "the Cinematheque," which became a non-profit exhibitor (*The News* would remain one of the non-profit activities of the organization).

The Canyon Cinema rental catalogue continued to grow, but by the early 1970s the number of rental requests was leveling off and operating revenues were becoming scarce. As a money-saving measure Canyon moved first to a warehouse in Sausalito; and then, when Don Lloyd, who had replaced Edith Kramer as Canyon manager, was replaced by Diane Kitchen, back to San Francisco. Regularly during this period the Board of Directors continued to debate the possibility of Canyon's achieving non-profit status, despite the fact that lawyer after lawyer assured them that Canyon was not a "non-profit organization." It was true that, increasingly during the early 1970s, most Canyon filmmakers did *not* make a profit from their films. This made it seem to some Board members that Canyon was the quintessential non-profit institution. However, the fact that no profit was made did not entitle the organization to non-profit status, since the goal of the organization *was* to offer filmmakers the opportunity to make a profit. If those involved with running Canyon were not particularly interested in making money, that was a choice. It is true that for most of those connected with Canyon, the idea that Canyon was "a business" *was* highly problematic. *The News* frequently warned readers against corrupt businessmen, and the Board had to force Edith Kramer to accept tiny raises to her very modest salary. Further, if the films Canyon distributed did not rent often enough to produce a profit, that was either a result of Canyon's refusal to market these films—again basically a choice—or of the fact that there was no demand for this product. If rentals had dramatically expanded during the

early 1970s, the filmmakers and Canyon itself might have made a substantial profit. The bottom line was that Canyon was a business satisfied with providing a service—but nevertheless a business—and therefore a for-profit organization.

As Canyon distribution expanded and became increasingly professionalized (largely as a result of the size of the collection and the damand for films), the community spirit that seemed to characterize the early Canyon did become more diffused. Judging from the minutes, Canyon Board meetings could be high-spirited, but these meetings were relatively infrequent. A sense of community was maintained at Cinematheque screenings and expanded through *The News*. Indeed, *The News* never entirely lost the small-town aura that Bruce Baillie had brought to the original Canyon Cinema screenings and that was a pervasive dimension of *The News* during his editorship (1965-1967). As the years went by, *The News* developed a national, even an international readership; and by the time Emory Menefee took over as editor in 1967 *The News* was beginning to publish longer essays: polemics of one kind or another, discussions of technical issues, reviews, letters from travelling filmmakers and from people organizing film events—especially avant-garde film events—around this country, and in Europe, Australia, and Japan. By the end of Menefee's editorship, what was now called the *Canyon Cinemanews* had become an important voice—one of the most important voices for the developing community of alternative filmmakers.[37] For a time after Menefee resigned as editor, *Canyon Cinemanews* passed from editor to editor: to Don Lloyd, then to Jan Lash and Petter Hutton (one issue: 71.2), to "guest editor," red sky (one issue: 71.3), then to Bruce Conner and Ben Van Meter (two issues: 72.1,2), Van Meter (72.3), Susan O'Neill (72.4), David Boatwright (72.5-6), and Al Saxton (73.1). During these years the comparative stability and consistency Menefee had brought to the magazine was lost, and individual issues varied a good deal in format and in feel. And then, for all practical purposes, *Canyon Cinemanews* went into a hiatus: from early 1973 until mid-1974 issues went to press (six in all), but contained little of interest. Finally in mid-1974 Diane Kitchen replaced Don Lloyd as manager of Canyon and not only revived *Canyon Cinemanews*, but took it to a new level. Increasingly, the *Cinemanews* was publishing interviews and polemics that were important theoretical statements by the filmmakers themselves.

In mid-1977 Kitchen transitioned out of the *Canyon Cinemanews* editorship, just as—after years of discussion and debate—Canyon's distribution and exhibition separated. The

Foundation for Art in Cinema, the now non-profit wing of Canyon, sponsored the Cinematheque and *The Cinemanews*. From mid-1977 on, the for-profit Canyon Cinema distribution was run by Michael Wallin, who had taken over when Diane Kitchen left and, from 1980 on, by Wallin and Dominic Angerame. When Wallin left in 1986, Angerame became director and has remained Canyon's director ever since. *The Cinemanews* was also in a transitional period. Mark McGowan took over the editorship from Kitchen and, after co-editing the July-August (77.4) issue with her and the September-October issue (77.5) by himself, filmmakers Henry Hills and Abigail Child, assisted by Stephanie Boris and Mark McGowan (now in charge of lay-out), shared editorial duties, and took *The Cinemanews* into its final phase.[38]

The separation of Canyon Cinema from the San Francisco Cinematheque and *The Cinemanews* allowed the Canyon staff's entire energies to be devoted to distribution and freed Canyon from the programming and publication controversies of the Cinematheque and the *Cinemanews*. Canyon did, from time to time, find itself embroiled in controversy, as for example when Canyon members and directors began to question Canyon's exclusive focus on film. Now that so many filmmakers were also videomakers, shouldn't Canyon also be renting video? In general, however, the Canyon offices had increasingly became a place of business, rather than a nexus for the Bay Area film community. Angerame and his colleagues did continue to make the facilities available to people interested in previewing films from the collection. Michael Wallin remembers that Godfrey Reggio came by one day in the early 1980s and arranged to rent and view dozens of films by Brakhage, Conner, Baillie—"all the big names. Money seemed no object to him. A couple of years later, when I finally saw *Koyaanisqatsi* [1983], I realized he had been ripping off ideas."[39]

During the 1980s Canyon Cinema distribution reversed the fall-off of rentals that had happened during the 1970s. Following the production of a new, expanded catalogue in 1982 (*Canyon Catalogue No. 5*) rental revenues improved considerably. The catalogue has been on-line since XXXX. The total rental figures for 1980-81 were $28,886; the year after the publication of the catalogue, $42,567; and five years later in 1988-89, $69,619. This revival of Canyon's fortunes—as modest as it might seem, especially compared with the mega-revenues involved in commercial film distribution—went a long way toward stabilizing the organization and made possible continued first-rate service and more humane salaries for those working for Canyon. In recent decades Canyon's fortunes have continued this modest expansion. Since the

1998-1999 fiscal year Canyon's gross income from rentals and sales have remained above $100,000; and in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, rentals reached all time highs of $154,000 and $175,191, respectively.

No sooner might one have begun to grow complacent about Canyon's fortunes than a serious threat to the organization became unavoidable. Beginning in 2004-2005 and continuing through 2005-2006, rentals of 16mm prints fell drastically. Angerame is confident that this is due to the proliferation of DVD versions of avant-garde films previously available only as 16mm prints: "I noticed a considerable drop-off in Brakhage's rentals soon after the DVD of Brakhage's films became available."[40] Indeed, during the past year, according to Angerame, Canyon has been losing about $2,000 a month. To make matters worse, Bruce Conner, sensing that Canyon was in serious trouble, pressured the Canyon Board to make detailed plans for Canyon to go out of business, and when the Board resisted, Conner withdrew his films from the rental collection—a major setback, since Conner was, like Brakhage, one of the most rented filmmakers in Canyon's collection. Various strategies for dealing with this new threat to Canyon's 16mm rental business are being considered, but as this introduction is written (May, 2006), a clear long-range plan has not emerged, though a letter asking for contributions has been drafted (see p. XXX).

One can only hope that Canyon can weather the challenge posed by DVD releases of 16mm films; the loss of this remarkable resource would be a disaster for the field of independent cinema and of film history in general. Surely, a resource this important cannot be allowed to disappear! But whatever does happen in the coming years, Canyon's founders can be proud: going on half a century after Bruce Baillie began to dream of a West Coast center for alternative cinema, the San Francisco Cinematheque (now under the directorship of Steve Polta) continues to provide one of the premiere American showcases for a wide range of independent film and video, and Canyon distribution continues to serve avant-garde filmmakers from around the world and those who program and teach their films..

2

In assembling *At Canyon's Edge: The Life and Times of a (Wildly) Independent Film Distributor*, I have several goals. The most obvious of these, of course, is to draw attention to

Canyon and proud of their connection with the organization. Thanks in particular to Bruce Baillie, Bruce Conner, Ken DeRoux, Jon Gartenberg, and Robert Nelson.

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[1] Recently, the traveling film series and now DVD collection, called "Unseen Cinema," has argued that what we now call "experimental" and "avant-garde" film is basically a continuation of the wholesale experimentation that characterized the earliest decades of movie-making. For access to "Unseen Cinema" contact www.unseen-cinema.com. "Unseen Cinema" was the brainchild of Bruce Posner, who edited a catalogue to accompany the series: *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941* (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Black Thistle Press, 2001). The Posner project is much indebted to Jan-Christopher Horak, ed., *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

[2]There have been any number of attempts to chart the early history of critical forms of cinema. Some of the more valuable of these include David Curtis's *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty-Year Evolution* (New York: Delta, 1971), Malcolm LeGrice's *Abstract Film and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA/London, UK: MIT Press, 1977), Jan-Christopher Horak's anthology *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), and Rudolf E. Kuenzli's anthology, *Dada and Surrealist Film* (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987).

[3] The San Francisco Cinematheque remains one of the premiere exhibitors of critical forms of cinema.

[4] For a history of early commercial distribution, see Charles Musser, *the Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Benjamin Hampton's *History of the American Film Industry, from Its Beginnings to 1951* (New York: Dover, 1970).

[5] Over the years, "avant-garde" has come to represent a body of films that, in a literal sense, may or may not be avant-garde, at least in the sense that they do something first; "experimental" is also common, though obviously some filmmakers do not like the term because they don't see their films as "experiments." "Independent film" has been co-opted by "low-budget" commercial filmmaking. And "alternative" is often useful, though many makers would rather see their films a valuable cultural contributions in their own right, rather than alternatives to something else. My personal preference has been for "critical cinema" though this too seems to assume that the history of avant-garde film cannot exist in its own right (it must offer a critique of conventional film). For anyone familiar with this field, the struggle for a moniker that will be satisfactory for filmmakers and those who see, write about and teach their films is both familiar and pointless, given the number and kinds of film such a term needs to encompass. But we must call this wide world of cinema *something*, and for purposes of this introduction, I'll use "avant-garde," with full awareness of the several limitations of this problematic but generally recognized term, though in particular instances several of these other terms will be useful as well.

[6]Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, pp. 5-15. Horak explains, "Earlier filmmakers [that is, American avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s/1930s] . . . thought of themselves primarily as film amateurs rather than as professionals. The professional was an employee in Hollywood, producing for hire a profit benefiting the corporate hierarchy, while the amateur was concerned with the cause of film art" (p. 15).

The 1920s also saw what appears to have been the film American film society, the Film Guild, founded and run by Symon Gould. At the moment, little is known about the Film Guild, unfortunately.

[7] See Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 71.

[8] For an overview of the ciné-club movement see Chapter 3 of Richard *Abel's French Cinema: The First Wave 1915-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). For a discussion of the American Workers' Cinema of the 1930s, see William Alexander, *Film on the Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[9] Haidee Wasson describes a pair of film societies that formed in 1933 for the purpose of exhibiting films not shown in public theaters: the New York Film Society and Film Forum. The first of these was devoted to the exhibition of a wide range of independent cinema; the second, to the exhibition of films from the political left; both film societies lasted less than a year, and neither seems to have had a distribution component. See *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 37-44.

[10] For a history of Cinema 16 see my *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); and my *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). See Cecile Starr's *Film Society Primer* (New York: American Federation of Film Societies, 1956) for a survey of the American film society movement.

[11] In her "'Some Kind of Racket': The Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, Hollywood and the Problem of Film Art, 1935 (*Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 9, no. 2 [Spring 2000], 5-29), Haidee Wasson describes the founding of the film library at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and its move into independent distribution. See also her *Museum Movies*...

[12] Brandon was not convinced that anything like a serious avant-garde film movement was beginning; in his *A Handbook for Film Societies*, included in the 1950 catalogue, he warns: "Avant-garde films—experimental films also may prove disappointing unless they are a definite interest of a particular audience, and in any case if they make up a full unrelieved stretch of two hours or so. There are some notable exceptions (which should be shown and encouraged), but many *current* experimental films made in the U.S. are specious and obscure and make little contribution to the exploration of the medium of its subject matter. Very stimulating experimental work has been done in Europe, the U.S.S.R., and Great Britain, and in recent years some outstanding work has been achieved in Canada."

[13] See Cecile Starr's comments in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, pp. 82-83.

[14] Bob Pike, in his UCLA Master's thesis, "A Critical Study of the West Coast Experimental Film Movement" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1960), p. 164. I am grateful to David James and *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), for his discussion of Pike's activities (pp. 219-221). James also mentions Kenneth Anger and Curtis Harrington's Creative Film Associates, founded in 1948, an informal distribution organization that attracted a variety of filmmakers, including Oskar Fischinger, the Whitney Brothers, Jordan Belson, Elwood Decker, and others.

[15] From the "First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," *Film Culture*, no. 22-23 (Summer 1961), pp. 131-133.

[16] The New York Film-makers' Cooperative currently uses a 60/40 split, with 60% of rental money going to the filmmaker, though, according to current director, M. M. Serra, a 50/50 split is being considered. Unlike Canyon, the New York Film-makers' Cooperative is since 199X a non-profit C-3 organization.

[17] European coops

[18] The revenue split between Canyon and its member filmmakers has undergone periodic changes, depending on the particular financial needs of the moment. In 1973 the debt that resulted from the publication of *Catalogue 3* resulted in a 50/40/10% split, with 50% going to the filmmakers, 40% to Canyon, and 10% to pay off the catalogue debt. Once the catalogue debt was paid off, the ratio changed to 50/50. In 1977 the filmmakers' percentage was raised to 60, and in 1979 to 65. The split remained 65/35 through the 1980s, and then, during the 1990s got incrementally smaller, until in 2001 it was changed to 50/50.

[19] I certainly do not mean to disparage the good work of other American distributors of critical cinema. Both the Film-makers' Cooperative and the Museum of Modern Art Circulating Film Library, the two most important distribution organizations other than Canyon that focus on critical forms of cinema, continue to provide very valuable services. Losing either would create a crisis in the field of independent cinema. But my personal experience over a number of years with these and other distributors has been somewhat less satisfactory than my experience with Canyon, both in terms of the quality of prints offered and the dependability of their arriving when scheduled.

[20] Bruce Baillie in my interview with him in A Critical Cinema 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 113-114.

[21] *The Canyon Cinemanews*, no. 76.2

[22] *The Canyon* Cinemanews, no. 76.2

[23] Unpublished interview with Chick Callenbach, 11/6/02.

[24] Strand, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings with Added Commentary from Chick Callenbach," *Canyon Cinemanews*, 76.4.

[25] David Sherman in an unpublished interview, 4/24/04.

Ken DeRoux, who worked at Canyon from 1969 to 1973 in a variety of capacities, was in charge of Canyon screenings for some years. During the years when Canyon's office was in the basement of Intersection, the Canyon screenings would take place upstairs in what had been a church; the seats, as DeRoux remembers, were pews. These screenings have much in common with the screenings that take place now in the microcinemas, except that they were probably more volatile. DeRoux remembers an argument breaking out during a screening between Bruce Conner and another viewer who refused to be quiet: "Suddenly, I heard a commotion behind me, and turned around to see Bruce running out of the theater, and heard a man behind me say, 'He *spit* on me!'" DeRoux, in an unpublished interview, 1/6/06.

[26] Rebecca Barton in an unpublished interview, 4/24/04.

[27] Ernest Callenbach in an unpublished interview, 11/6/03

[28] Jordan in an unpublished interview, 8/12/03.

[29] Baillie, in my interview with him in *A Critical Cinema 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 116.

[30] The Canyon Cinema newsletter began as *The News*, and remained *The News* until the October-November issue of 1964 (2.8), when it became *Canyon Cinema News*. The next change occurred in July, 1967, when it became *Canyon Cinemanews*, which it remained through the July-August,

1977 issue (77.4), when it became the *Foundation for Art in Cinema Cinemanews*, then from January, 1977 (77.7) through September-October, 1977, the *Foundation for Art in Cinema Cinema News*; and finally from November-December, 1978 until the end of its run, *The Cinemanews.*

[31] Steve Anker, "The San Francisco Cinematheque: A Brief History," in the catalogue, *San Francisco Cinemathque: Four Decades of Film and Video*, published by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Cinematheque in 2001.

In 1974 Vincent Grenier took over Cinematheque programming "and initiated a greater emphasis on…[films] by East Coast and Eurropean artists,"[31] and began regular open screenings. In 1975 Carmen Vigil and Charles Wright took over from Grenier, and when Wright left in 1977, Vigil remained principal programmer until 1982, when the Cinematheque Board insisted he relinquish control of the programming—a result in part of a growing dissatisfaction among many Bay Area filmmakers with "the Cinematheque's role in the local film community," and with Vigil's continued championing of those makers who had become part of the avant-garde canon in the 1960s and early 1970s. During the 1980s Steve Anker, working in concert with David Gerstein (who had become the Cinematheque's Executive Director in 1983—he remained director until 1994), oversaw Cinematheque programming, expanding the Cinematheque's range (in 1985, for example, Anker curated the Cinematheque's first all-video program) and visibility. Anker remained in charge of exhibition, after 1994 with Irina Leimbacher, until he left to become Dean of the Film Program at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia; and Steve Polta took over in 2002. Once the Cinematheque split from Canyon Cinema in 1977 the history of the two organizations became and remained separate and distinct. Of course, when the history of American alternative exhibition is written, the Canyon/San Francisco Cinematheque will require a substantial chapter.

[32] Unpublished interview with Lenny Lipton, c.4/04. Lipton stopped making films around 1975, and turned to stereoscopic imaging. His company StereoGraphics developed the device that makes possible the 3-D imagery of the surface of Mars.

[33] The sixteen-page catalogue is identical in its listings to the News listing in the November, 1966 issue. Supplements 1, 2, and 3 of *Catalogue Number Two* are paginated so that each begins where the previous listing leaves off.

[34] Ken DeRoux was in charge of getting this catalogue out.

[35] *Catalog 4* (no editor is listed) appeared in 1976; a supplement ("made by" Philip Perkins, Warren Bass, Stephanie Boris, Janet Perlberg, Michael Wallin, and Gwin Graphics), in 1978; *Catalog 5* (by Dominic Angerame, Andrew Moore, and Michael Wallin) in 1982, followed by a supplement (put together by Dominic Angerame and Mary V. Marsh); *Catalog 6* ("compiled and edited by" Nina Fonoroff and Melanie Curry), in 1988, followed by a "Film/Video Supplement" (by Dominic Angerame and Melanie Curry), also in 1988, and another (by Melanie Curry and Amy Stewart) in 1990; *Film/Video Catalog 7* ("compiled and edited by" Melanie Curry and Heather Mackey), in 1992; and the most recent printed catalogue, the unnumbered *Film/Video Catalog 2000* (edited by Christine Metropoulos, designed by Kevin Barnard, proofed by Susan Vogel), in 2000. The Canyon Catalogue is now on-line at www.canyoncinema.com.

[36] Unpublished interview with Larry Jordan, 8/12/03.

[37] *Film Culture*, edited by P. Adams Sitney and connected with the New American Cinema, Jonas Mekas, and what became Anthology Film Archives also focused on this community, though *Film Culture*—as its moniker suggests—was, from the beginning, more scholarly and

closer to an academic quarterly. Throughout its history the *Cinemanews* was resolutely non-academic.

[38] Though the same group of people were involved in producing the *Cinemanews/Cinema News/The Cinemanews* during 1977 to 1979, they functioned in somewhat different capacities from issue to issue. Issue 77.6 was edited by Henry Hills; Stephanie Boris was Production Editor, and Mark McGowan did lay-out. 78.7 was edited by Abigail Child; 78.2 (thre was no 78.1), by Hills, with Boris and McGowan in the same roles. 78.3/4 was edited by Hills, with Child as Assistant Editor (again with Boris and MeGowan in the same roles). 78.5 lists Janis Crystal Lipzin and Joel Singer as co-editors with Janet Perlberg the Production Editor and McGowan doing layout. For 78.6/79.1 Child was West Coast Editor and Hills, East Coast Editor, Perlberg was Production Editor, and McGowan did layout; for 79.2-4, Hills and Childs were East Coast Editors; Carmen Vigil and McGowan, West Coast Editors, and Gail Vachon and Robert E. Galloway were co-Production Editors; and in 79.5-6, Hills was Editor; Child, East Coast Editor; and Vigil and McGowan did lay-out.

[39] Unpublished interview with Michael Wallin, 1/21/06.

[40] Phone conversation with Angerame, 5/22/06. *by Brakhage*, produced by Peter Becker and Kate Elmore for Criterion and released in 2003, includes twenty-six Brakhage films, including such frequently rented films as *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959) and *Mothlight* (1963).

Merry Christmas

to Canyon

From Us

1987

Hey guys - please put up
on the wall, for all.

Merry Christmas.

Just finished the 1st show
(VHS) - will send a copy soon.

love & kisses - B. B.'s

films by

Bruce Baillie

AUGUST 25. UC, 145 DWINELLE.

AUGUST 28. CANYON CINEMA
at INTERSECTION, 150 ELLIS, SF.

AUGUST 29. MENDOCINO COAST
GALLERY, MENDOCINO. All 8:30 PM.

UC and CANYON CINEMA:
BENEFIT FOR BEN VAN METER

MENDOCINO: BENEFIT FOR NEON PARK

CASTRO STREET

YELLOW HORSE

TERMINATION

ALL MY LIFE

STILL LIFE

TUNG

MASS

AUGUST 26. STRAIGHT THEATER,
(ARMENIAN HALL, 1563 PAGE, SF)
8:00 PM: Showing QUIXOTE,
ALL MY LIFE, MASS, STILL LIFE,
and TO PARSIFAL.

Also, Newsreel: Part Chicago napalm vigil

BRUCE BAILLIE

Visiting Film-maker

Screening of "ROSLYN ROMANCE" (Is It Really True?) Introduction and Concluding Section "The Cardinal's Visit," and discussion by the artist

From "The Cardinal's Visit" Photograph by Holly Thomas

The Cardinal: Bruce Baillie
The Bishop: Elliot Caplan

Thursday, March 12 - 7:30 p.m.
Bjorling Concert Hall
Gustavus Adolphus College

Bruce Baillie Photograph by Holly Thomas

Other BRUCE BAILLIE films will be shown in the Schaefer Art Gallery Lecture Room as follows:

Tues., March 3 - 7:30 p.m.
TO PARSIFAL (1963), MASS FOR THE DAKOTA SIOUX (1963-64), CASTRO STREET (1966)

Thurs., March 5 - 7:30 p.m.
QUICK BILLY (1967-70)

Friday, March 6 - 11:30 a.m.
QUIXOTE (1964-65), VALENTINE DE LAS SIERRAS (1968)

No admission charge for above showings

"The work seems to be a sort of manual, concerning all the stuff of the cycle of life, from the most detailed mundanery to . . . God knows."

"It's trying to give people some useful information on how to live. So it has to be mundane and also sublime."

— Bruce Baillie

for more films
please.
- B.B.

Canyon Cinema
St. # 338
2325 3rd St.
S.F., Ca. 94107

Quick Billy

(Feet Fear)

A MAJOR WORK IN 4 PARTS BASED ON THE BARDO THÖDOl (the Tibetan Book of the Dead)

Composers have often chosen the (Catholic) Mass as a basis for composing a musical work; in such a way has this work in contemporary, independent Cinema taken the Tibetan Bardo Thodol for its essential content, as well as its structure. The authors choice arose in a time of personal crisis when the ancient Buddhist text appeared,'almost magically' and became his guide through that 'time of uncertainty'; between physic death and birth, The Bardo.

Not a documentary work in the exterior sense; the film is rather, a personal, poetic depiction of that mental, transitional plane of passing, from one life...into the Unknown.

The Author has chosen the fourth reel to give us a short narrative summary & conclusion in the style of the one reeler western genre. (As in Billy the Kid..The 'Billy' figure being the profane aspect of the implied schism which is mans eternal dilemna, that is being, somehow between 'good & evil', Heaven & Hell, the Blissful and the mundane.)''

Translation by Elmar Lloyd Bish of an article* by Ms. Kikuko Kawasaki, Modern Music Review volume 213 May 1978, Yokasuka, Japan.

A film By

Bruce Baillie

WEDNESDAY JULY 29 AT 8:30
at the Karma tri Yana Darhma Chakra
Woodstock, New York

(Admission Limited to Retreat Participants)

and

FRIDAY JULY 31 at 8:30
at the Orygen Cho Dzong
Route 81, Greenville, N.Y.

Open To Public

1/99: (Even more revealing when viewed from the Japanese perspective) - B.B.

This program is Sponsored by the Catskill Gypsy Cinema with Funding from C.A.P.S. and assistance from Creative Music Studio

* Evolution of the Human Phyche through Religion and Art. (1980 approx.)